



COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA JOINT LEADERSHIP COUNCIL OF VETERANS SERVICE ORGANIZATIONS

101 N. 14TH ST., 17TH FLOOR
RICHMOND VA 23219

*Air Force Association
American Legion
AMVETS
Association of the United
States Army
Disabled American
Veterans
Fifth Baptist Veterans
Ministry
Fleet Reserve Association
Iraq & Afghanistan Veterans
of America
Korean War Veterans
Association
Legion of Valor of the
U.S., Inc.
Marine Corps League
Military Order of the
Purple Heart
Military Officers Association
of America
Military Order of the
World Wars
Navy Mutual Aid Association
Navy Seabee Veterans of
America
Non-Commissioned
Officers Association
Paralyzed Veterans of
America
Reserve Officers Association
Roanoke Valley Veterans
Council
Veterans of Foreign Wars
Vietnam Veterans of America
Virginia Army/Air National
Guard Enlisted
Association
Virginia National Guard
Association
Women Marines Association*

Governor Ralph S. Northam
Patrick Henry Building
1111 E. Broad St., 3rd Floor
Richmond, VA 23219

On behalf of the Joint Leadership Council, I write to share that we have been briefed on the funding necessary to assure veterans in rural Virginia have reliable access to telehealth services, as well as education and business opportunities through universal broadband. We greatly enjoyed the briefing we received last January at JLC Day and several VSO members of JLC have signed on to the Governor's Commonwealth Connect Coalition of broadband providers, localities, Fortune 500 companies, VSOs and other diverse organizations – with the goal of universal coverage and supporting the Virginia Telecommunication Initiative (VATI).

The JLC believes all 715,000 Virginia veterans deserve access to quality broadband and the opportunity to fully participate in modern American life, not just those in the "Eastern Crescent." As your Administration estimates there are 600,000 Virginians without access to the internet, we estimate that this number includes at least 150,000 veterans.

Rural veterans are substantially more likely to enroll in the VA health care system than urban veterans, but live further from medical facilities, thereby needing reliable internet service to access VA telehealth services. A report by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and Amazon, *Unlocking the Digital Potential of Rural America*, estimates that for Virginia, the increased access to digital tools would result in \$452M in annual wages, and \$1.29B added overall to the state GDP per year.

Universal broadband service will provide veterans in rural areas with more opportunities to take advantage of their GI Bill benefits through online education programs. Universal broadband service will provide veterans the opportunity to become entrepreneurs and start up small businesses in small towns and rural communities, adding to the New Virginia Economy.

The JLC stands at the ready to be of assistance to you and your Commonwealth Connect team in pushing for broadband funding in Virginia. Thank you for the opportunity to voice our support for this critical funding.

Sincerely,
Frank G. Wickersham, III
Chairman
MOAA Representative

cc: Secretary Carlos Hopkins